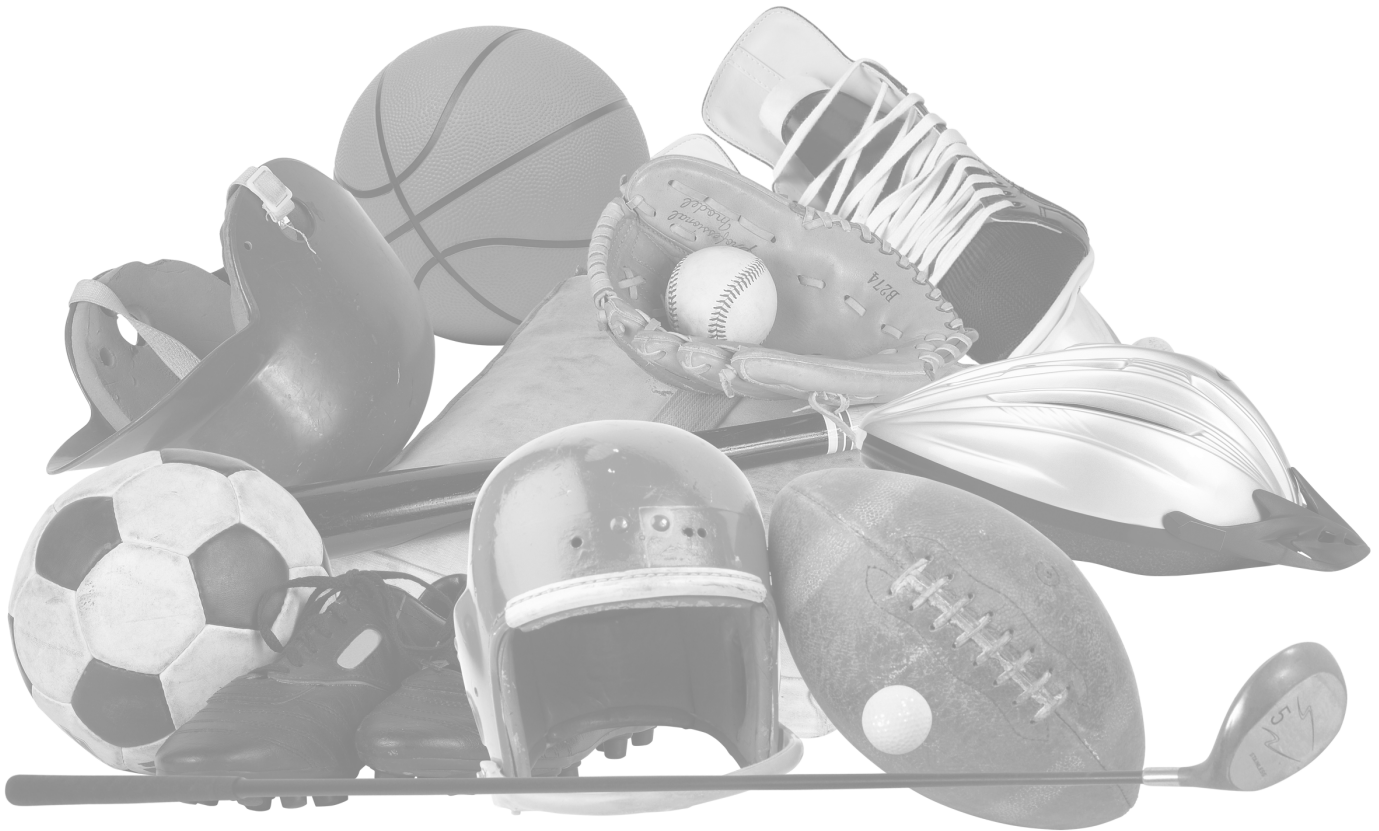


The Condition of Youth Sports in Larimer County

Spring - Summer 2005

An opinion poll of local youth sports participants



HEALTHIER
*Communities Coalition
of Larimer County*

Working together to improve
Larimer County residents health and well-being

The Condition of Youth Sports in Larimer County Spring-Summer 2005

Foreword

A recent opinion poll of local youth sports participants, including youth, parents and coaches, reveals that negative, often violent behaviors that can turn little league games into rage-filled frenzies happen infrequently in Larimer County.

“Parents gone wild on Little Leaguers.” “Fixing Kids’ Sports – Rescuing children’s games from crazed coaches and parents.” “Let kids play ... Adults are ruining youth sports.”

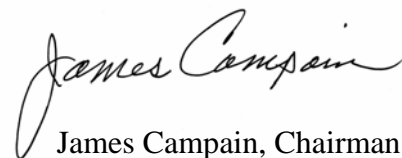
These are just some of the headlines and messages in the national media that depict disturbing trends in youth sports, but our local programs do not appear to be following suit. However, the local poll did reveal that almost all parents and coaches support a “code of ethics” or agreed-upon standards regarding behavior associated with youth sports, implying that the Fort Collins community supports proactive measures to combat the increasingly negative trends increasing in youth sports.

In September 2001, the Fort Collins City Council, the Larimer County Commissioners and the Poudre School District all passed resolutions pledging their commitment to promoting character in our schools, businesses, homes, churches, city government, media and the community in general. The resolutions also called for teaching positive character traits to our youth, as well as providing more positive role models.

Youth sports programs across Larimer County already include character building components, but the belief of local parents and coaches is that more can be done to ensure sports programs continue to provide positive role models. Playing fields can be designated as character development fields where character development becomes locked into the fabric of our community.

In September 2005, America's Promise® - The Alliance for Youth designated Fort Collins and Loveland together as one of the 100 Best Communities for Young People. The communities won based on their collaborative efforts to provide healthy, safe and caring environments for young people.

It is important for our community, which has committed many resources toward the development of good character and providing safe, positive places for youth, to continue in this vein. Our goal should be to maintain, improve and reward character excellence even as national trends point to deteriorating conditions elsewhere. Ensuring that youth sports programs focus on building character as much as skills and a winning spirit will do just that.



James Campaign, Chairman
Coaching Character Committee
Healthier Communities Coalition of Larimer County

The Condition of Youth Sports in Larimer County Spring-Summer 2005

Summary

Youth sports in Larimer County are in better shape than those across the nation, according to a poll recently conducted by the Healthier Communities Coalition of Larimer County (HCC) and the Colorado State University Research and Development Center. In summer 2005, the agencies polled 273 parents, 51 youth ages 7-11, 127 youth ages 12-18 and 20 coaches at a variety of sporting events across the region to determine if our communities' youth sports programs are suffering the same negative trends on the rise in youth sports nationwide.

A 2005 U.S. News and World Report article painted a dismal picture of the role organized sports play in the lives of young men and women across the nation. The article included the following statistics:

- A survey of 3,300 parents found that 84% of them had witnessed “violent parental behavior” toward children, coaches or officials at youth sports events, and 80% said they had been victims of such behavior.
- A 1999 South Florida survey of 500 adults found 82% saying parents were too aggressive in youth sports and 56% said they had personally witnessed overly aggressive behavior.

Jim Campain, HCC Coaching Character Committee chairman - the committee that coordinated the local poll - said local results indicate these negative behaviors are less prevalent in Larimer County's youth sports programs. “We are pleased to find that our statistics are not as grim as the national statistics, although in some cases there are similar trends.”

An area where Larimer County youth sports programs seem better than their counterparts across the nation is in the observed behavior of coaches, parents and players. Local results show that:

- Ninety percent of coaches polled said they observe positive, encouraging behavior among players most of the time; 85% said this is true among fellow coaches most of the time; and 75% indicated they observe this positive behavior from parents most of the time.
- Ninety percent of parents polled said they observe positive, encouraging behavior among players and fellow parents; 93% of parents said coaches exhibit this behavior.
- By comparison, 77% of youth ages 7–11 say they observe these positive behaviors by fellow players most of the time, and only 66% of youth ages 12–18 indicated this occurred most of the time.
- Youth had a different take on the behavior of coaches and parents, however, with only 48% of youth ages 7–11 and 54% of youth ages 12–18 indicating they observe positive encouraging behaviors among coaches most of the time.

The Condition of Youth Sports in Larimer County Spring-Summer 2005

- Only 21% of youth ages 7–11 said that parents exhibited these behaviors most of the time, while 88% of youth ages 12–18 indicated they observe positive encouraging behaviors from parents most of the time.

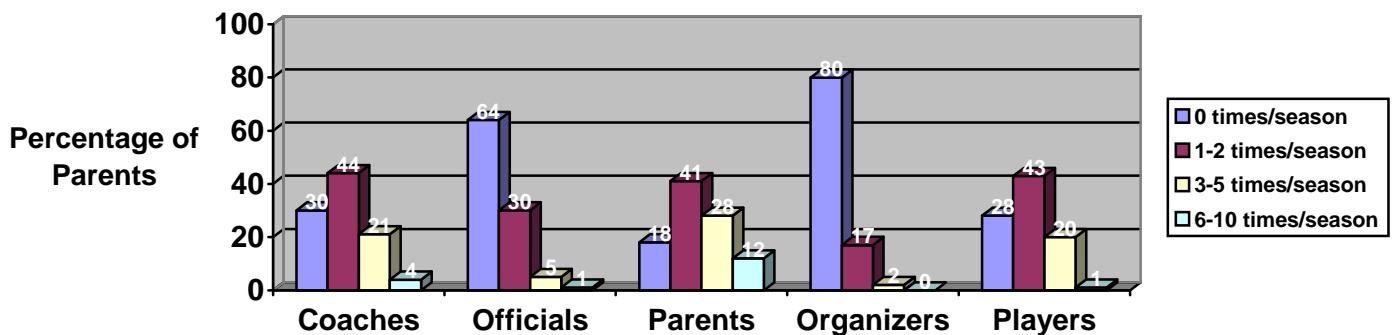
When youth ages 12–18 were asked further about the behavior of coaches, parents, teammates and other players, only 9% said the behavior of coaches and parents needs to change, 4% said the behavior of their teammates needs to change and 12% said the behavior of other players needs to change. (See Figure 1)

Similarly, only 12% of youth ages 7–11 responded that they “don’t like” the behavior of coaches, 8% “don’t like” the behavior of parents, 6% “don’t like” the behavior of teammates and 17% “don’t like” the behavior of other players.

Even though positive behavior is observed most of the time on playing fields around the county, there is still concern among coaches and parents about the *potential* for anger and violence. According to the local poll, 45% of parents have concerns. Parents reported that when they do witness inappropriate behavior, such as yelling rude remarks, it is from other parents, followed closely by inappropriate behavior on the part of coaches and players.

A majority of parents indicated they never witness inappropriate behavior from officials and organizers. (See Figure 1)

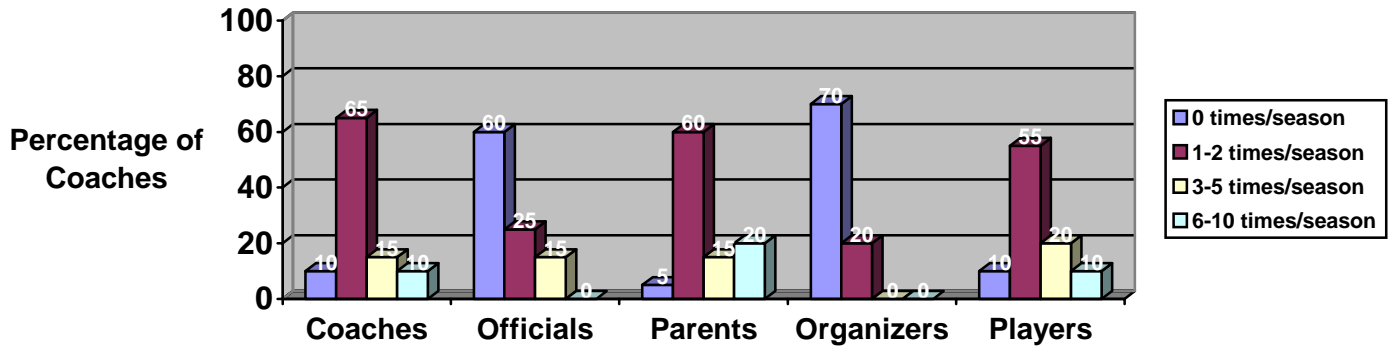
Figure 1 - Frequency of Parents Witnessing Inappropriate Behavior Among Coaches, Officials, Parents, Organizers and Players



Like parents, coaches also indicated concerns about the potential for anger and violence, with 75% attributing those concerns for angry, violent behavior to parents, 55% to coaches and 50% to players. Coaches’ concerns are not unwarranted as they reported that they most frequently witness inappropriate behavior from parents, with coaches and players being tied in a close second. (See Figure 2)

The Condition of Youth Sports in Larimer County Spring-Summer 2005

**Figure 2 - Frequency of Coaches Witnessing Inappropriate Behavior
Among Coaches, Officials, Parents, Organizers and Players**



Although minimizing inappropriate behavior, or the potential for it, is important, having fun is what sports are all about, according to local youth. Seventy-eight percent of respondents ages 7–11 and 77% of respondents ages 12–18 said the main reason they want to play sports is to have fun. Eighty percent of coaches agree, however, most parents (70%) want their child/children to play sports for health and exercise reasons. Only 62% of parents said “having fun” was a main reason for wanting their child/children to play sports.

According to the local poll, kids also place more emphasis on improving their skills than their parents or coaches. Sixty-eight percent of youths ages 7–11 and 64% of youths ages 12–18 said they play sports to improve their skills. Parents (54%) and coaches (45%) said improving skills was a main reason for playing team sports.

TEAM Fort Collins’ Executive Director Scoot Crandall is on HCC’s Coaching Character Committee and provides some interesting data related to kids having fun in sports – or not. “Reality Check,” a high school curriculum provided by TEAM to area schools, has a stress management class that surveys students on a variety of issues related to stress in their lives. For more than four years, students have been asked to identify their top five stressors and for four years, organized sports consistently has been on the list.

An area where local poll results were virtually unanimous among coaches and parents was in support of a “code of ethics” or agreed-upon standards regarding behavior associated with youth sports. One hundred percent of coaches say that *all* adults should adhere to a code of ethics and 99% of parents agree. Both groups also agree coaches need more training about youth developmental needs.

According to Bob Powell, director of Character Fort Collins and a partner to HCC’s Coaching Character Committee, “The focus on the results (winning or losing) of organized team sports needs to be balanced with the need to promote character development throughout the process. The opportunity that organized sports provides for a young person

The Condition of Youth Sports in Larimer County Spring-Summer 2005

to learn life lessons is invaluable and should be integrated into the child's life and reinforced at home, school and the communities' playing fields."

Kim Sharpe, HCC coordinator, along with the members of the Coaching Character Committee, will be discussing these poll results with a variety of key community leaders and will devise strategies to increase the value organized sports can play in the lives of our children. "The poll sheds light on many of the positive aspects of organized sports, and we wish to build on them and continue to make northern Colorado a great place to raise kids," Sharpe said.

One of the first actions will be establishing "character excellence" standards for a "mark of distinction" to be awarded to youth sports teams and organizations that use sports as an opportunity to develop good character in all participants, and consistently display exemplary sportsmanship and character traits. The effort is being led by HCC and Character Fort Collins in collaboration with Colorado State University, the City of Fort Collins and Poudre School District.

For more information, or to get involved, contact Kim Sharpe, HCC coordinator, at (970) 495-7503 or krs4@pvhs.org.